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Individual styles of learning vary considerably, and not enough attention has been paid to this fact by teachers and educators. If a bright child makes very poor progress in school, the immediate assumption today is likely to be that he has an emotional problem. Actually, he may simply take a long time to "warm up," and has become so discouraged that he seldom perseverse beyond the warm-up stage. Enabled to understand his learning style, he may make considerable progress because once well into his task, his style will aid perseverance and inhibit distraction. Another child may be a "physical" learner. The written word never contains the meaning for him that the spoken word holds. His reading ability and interest in abstract learning will be much improved if he is made aware of his style and encouraged to discuss and participate in role-playing activities concerning the subject matter he studies abstractly.

Various transitional techniques may be used to overcome some of the weaknesses in a pupil's style. Periods of constant verbal interchange between teacher and pupils serve to keep the children's attention focused and build skill in listening. Bringing weaknesses up to minimum efficiency frees strengths for their fullest development.

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# THE STRATEGY OF STYLE

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I would like to discuss a concept which I think has been ignored a good deal in teaching and guidance. It is the concept of style, in particular, the style of learning. I believe a crucial element in the development of the individual's learning relates to a careful understanding of the idiosyncratic style elements in the learning process. Students of learning have focused a good deal on rather abstract, molecular concepts of learning derived from pigeons and rats, via Dr. Skinner and Dr. Hull. I am not suggesting that these concepts of learning are not useful, but I think that we have missed the possible value of a more wholistic (molar) or global dimension of learning, operative at the phenomenal level, which I am referring to as style.

One index of style relates to whether you learn things most easily through reading or through hearing, or whether you learn through doing things physically; whether you learn things slowly, or quickly; whether you learn things in a one track way or whether you are very flexible in your learning. The examples just cited are not to be seen as separate from one another. There can be combinations such as a visual-physical learner who learns in a slow, one track fashion. As a matter of fact, this last pattern is more characteristic of the disadvantaged child. He learns more slowly, he learns through the physical (that is, by doing things, touching things), he learns visually, and he functions in a rather one track way; he doesn't shift easily, and is not highly flexible in his learning. This is, of course, an ideal type statement -- a model.

Let me cite just a few other dimensions of style so that different aspects of it can be seen. For example, some people like to work under pressure; they like a deadline and they like tests. (Low income youngsters do not like this.) Some people like to leave a lot of time for their work -- they like to have an abundance of time. Some people like to think or even read while walking. Some people like to work in a cold room, some in a warm room. Some people like to work for long periods of time without

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a break, some people like to shift-- have frequent breaks. Some people take a long time to warm up, while others warm up and get into work very quickly. Some people like to have all of the facts in front of them before they can do any generalizing, and others prefer to have a few facts. Some people like "props," some people do not.

Typically people do not know their own style nearly well enough. What I am really concerned about is how you can use this concept to improve your manner of work -- whether it be teaching or guidance, or social work or psychiatry. Although I am mainly concerned with working with lower socio-economic groups, I do not mean to imply that the concept of style should be limited to these strata.

## The Cognitive Approach vs The Emotional Approach

Guidance workers have focused far too much on the categories of emotion, motivation, personality, rather than the cognitive categories--- learning and thinking. There has been much too much emphasis on the emotional approach in attempting to understand why the child doesn't learn. Little careful analysis is given to how the child's learning might improve simply by concentrating on the way that he works and learns, rather than on his emotional reasons for not learning. This thesis is almost directly counter to the current view. Today if a child doesn't learn (and he has intellectual ability), it is quickly assumed that it must be due to some emotional block or conflict. I am trying to suggest a different way of looking at the problem. He might not be learning because his methods of learning are not suited to his style and hence he has not utilized his power. I would be willing to argue that even where his difficulties are, in part, emotional or due to conflict, it still may be possible to ignore this particular focus, and concentrate on the specific expression of the difficulty itself, namely, his learning pattern. Even if you do not accept my premise that the emotional causes have been over-emphasized, you might be willing to give an ear to the possibility of dealing with the problem in non-emotional, non-psychodynamic terms. Unfortunately teachers, too often, have behaved like psychologists and social workers. It seems to me that teachers do not sufficiently stress learning processes and styles of learning but rather prefer motivational categories. I think that one way to build up prestige in the teaching profession is not simply to borrow from psychologists and sociologists, but to concentrate on the development of what education is most concerned with, namely, learning and teaching. When one does borrow from psychology, it might be better to concentrate on the areas of learning and cognition rather than personality and motivation.

## The General and The Idiosyncratic

You have all probably taken courses in learning, educational psychology and the like. I suspect that you haven't learned enough

from these courses. I don't think this is your fault. I think that the problem is pretty much that these courses have borrowed heavily from animal learning experiments which by itself is not necessarily bad, but the particular concepts and formulations developed by the animal literature have not been easily applicable to the kinds of learning problems that you encounter, such as whether a child learns slowly, whether he is a physical learner, or whether it takes him a long time to warm up. I think these are problems which are nearer to our subjective experience but the psychological literature and animal experiments have not really helped us to deal with them very much. When educational psychology courses have actually studied human learning, the focus has not been on the problems that you might be most concerned with -- the problems that I think are related to style. When these courses attempt to deal with study habits they are entirely too general. There is a great deal more to study habits than meets the eye of the introductory psychology text book. The typical suggestions in the chapter on study habits are based upon various experiments which seem to indicate that distributive learning is better, that one should survey material first, etc. But very little is directed toward the idiosyncratic factors that are involved. For example: some people simply can't tolerate surveying a chapter first. They become so anxious, so disturbed, by being asked to look at the overall view of the chapter, that they can't function. These people want very much to read a chapter atomistically This is their style. It won't help to simply tell such a person that he is not proceeding in the right way and that he really ought to read the chapter as a whole first. The same is true in terms of the general recommendation that you should have a quiet place to study. Strangely enough, some people study quite well in a noisy place, or with certain kinds of noise, and completely quiet places are not best for them. Some people take a long time to warm up and consequently a great deal of spacing (or distribution) of learning would not be useful for them. This is their style. But the textbook does not tell you this, because in general, over a large number of cases, spaced learning is best.

The same argument applies to examination or tests. For some people a test operates as just the right mild anxiety to stimulate the integration of a great deal of material that needs to be learned. On the other hand, there are a large number of people for whom tests are terrible because they disorganize them, make them too anxious and thus prevent them from working. Tests are not conducive to the style of these individuals. When people argue about tests being bad for people because it produces too much anxiety for learning, they're talking about these people. When others argue that tests are marvelous because they aid pupils by providing corrections and criticism, they are referring to a different style. Undoubtedly, this works for some pupils. But there are students who forget their wrong answers on tests, because it disturbs them so much to remember them.

As a matter of fact, there is a great deal of controversy in the traditional literature on the very question of whether repression of wrong answers occurs or whether "punishment" for giving the wrong answers on tests helps to produce better recall. I am suggesting that two different kinds of styles are involved here. For some people the information that they gave wrong answers is extremely useful and challenging. If this information is called to their attention in a definite stimulating way, it makes the wrong answer the "figure in the ground." It draws the incorrect responses to their attention. For other people, knowing that they have made a mistake is extremely disturbing, morale destroying, and leads to a repressing of this material. Therefore, depending upon your style and your way of dealing with these problems, tests may be useful or not useful for you.

The Modification of Style and Habit: Various Strategies

My main task is to try to formulate the possible ways in which the strengths of the individual's style can be utilized and the weaknesses reduced or controlled. I think at this stage in our discussion of style it is sometimes difficult to distinguish style and habit. By style I mean the more fundamental, underlying characteristics. For example, the physical style we have discussed. I think this style is laid down early in life and is not subject to fundamental change, although it is possible to bend it and to develop it. Another aspect of style may be much more malleable and may be more related to habit or set, that is, it may be a derivative or secondary expression of style.

Let us take as an example, what I call the "games" focus of low income youngsters. They like to learn things through games rather than through tests. To put something in the forms of games is an excellent transitional technique for winning their interest. But I do not know how basic a habit this is. It may be much more changeable than the underlying physical style. These questions are open to further investigation and research. I am simply trying to provide a general framework by means of which to deal with the question. I am not sure which elements are more or less changeable. I do think some are quite unchangeable and quite basic while some are more changeable. If you are a person who likes to learn by listening and speaking ( aural style), I do not think you could change completely and become a reader in your style. I am not suggesting that you will not learn to read and write fluently, but your best learning, the long lasting, deep learning that gets into your muscles, is more likely to derive from speaking and hearing.

Now let me return to the problem I am essentially trying to deal with -- the strategy style -- the strategy of producing basic change in people through understanding and utilizing their styles.

I want to develop the idosyncratic strengths, find ways of employing the unorthodox, the specific, the unique, and in some ways limit the weaknesses in the person's style. Under certain conditions you can overcome some of the weak elements of the style pattern through compensatory efforts and through special techniques that we will talk about. I think it is more likely to overcome some of these weaknesses when they are at the level of sets and habits.

In approaching our problem, the first aim is to have the person become aware of the strengths and potential in his style -- because this is going to be the source of his power. Thus, if an individual has a physical style, he has to learn the special attributes of this style and how to use them. The guidance counselor or teacher will have to help him overcome the invidious interpretations of this style that are prevalent in our society.

Let us take an illustration of a different type. A youngster tells you that he sits down to work but he cannot concentrate. It is extremely important at this point (and this is crucial in the diagnosis of style) to ascertain as precisely as possible exactly what takes place in this youngster's routine. For example, ask him: When does he study? What time does he come home from school? What does he do first when he comes into the house? He may say: "I come home, throw down my books and then I start to remember that I have to do some work. So I get out my books. I try to work. I take out the book, but my mind wanders. I look at the book, I look away, I can't get into the work and after a few minutes of trying this I begin to feel discouraged, I begin to feel bad. I feel I can't work, I'm not interested, I'm no good, I get very worried about this, panic builds up, and then I run from the work." There are many possibilities operating in this pattern. One possibility is that this youngster has what we call a slow period of warm up. He does not easily get into something new, he does not shift from whatever he's been doing before (whether he's been outside playing ball, or listening to the radio). This may be due to a number of reasons. It may be due to the fact that he is a physical learner. If you're a physical learner you generally have to be involved physically in the work process. You have to get your muscles into it, and this takes time. If this is his pattern, the youngster must come to understand that he is slow to warm up and this is not necessarily a negative quality; it is rather, a different way of approaching work. As a matter of fact, it may very often be connected to perseverance, once he gets involved! Once he is immersed, he may go deeper and deeper and not be able to shift away from the work easily. The inability to shift doesn't then operate as negative feature but a positive-element. The youngster I described to you a few moments ago never gets to this point. It's not that he doesn't persevere

somewhere, in baseball or somewhere else. But in his schoolwork he's never gotten past the point of the slow warm up. In order to use his pattern effectively, he has to schedule work accordingly. He cannot schedule work so that he works for one hour. That's no good because it takes him a half hour to warm up. Even if he were to be successful and stick with it for the half hour as a result of your support and stimulation, the problem would remain at the end of the half hour of only having a short time left to work. Consequently he has to plan a larger time period of work and recognize in advance that it will take him about a half hour to warm up. In other words, you have to give a new definition to this work pattern in order to get the positive out of it. You'll discover, by the way, that a number of other things will happen, if I'm right about the diagnosis. Over a period of time, this warm up period will shorten because part of the difficulty in the long warm-up is the anxiety that emerges as he tries to get into the work and fails. Thus, by getting into the work, his anxiety decreases and his interest will probably increase.

Now let us take another example, one in which you can use the person's strenths to deal with his weaknesses. How do you teach a person how to read when reading is not his basic style? Everyone is going to need reading ability and writing ability regardless of his style. In order to teach reading, you might want to use role playing which is more related to the physical style of the individual. He could read about something that he just role played or he could read about a trip he had taken. Keep in mind that while you are teaching reading, you are not developing a reading style. What you're doing is developing a skill, and you're developing a balance in the person's style. You're developing minimal efficiency in an area which is not rooted in his style. In a sense you're going after the Achilles Heel, his weakness, the reading difficulty, by developing it through his strength, whether it be visual, physical, or whatever. This is a basic tactic for defeating or limiting the weakness by connecting it to the strengths.

There are some other things you can do in the terms of your strategy of style. You can use various transitional techniques for overcoming some of the weaknesses in a person's style. For example, low income youngsters come to the school situation with a very poor auditory set. They're not accustomed to listening to people read stories to them. I suggest that this kind of pattern can be limited quite a bit and can be overcome up to a point. I don't think you can develop a basic aural style in this youngster, but you can teach him to learn through listening, although this isn't his best mode of learning. One of the techniques for doing this was developed by a man who used this approach with schizophrenic children. This technique was simply to make a game out of the auditory problem. He would say, for example, what is 6 and 5? And everybody in the class would have to answer many different times. The pupil cannot fall asleep in this class. He can be asked at any point, what is

6 and 5. Answering once, doesn't leave him free. He may be asked again. This is an excellent technique for waking up youngsters, and it has been effective with low income youngsters who are not used to listening. The objective is to bring them up to minimal listening ability, up to grade level. I want to bring low income youngsters far beyond grade level, in most areas, because I think they have considerable creative ability, but in their areas of weakness I would be happy to bring them up to grade level. In areas of weaknesses our aim should be to function on a minimal basis so that our weaknesses will not destroy our strengths. Techniques of this kind may be useful, in reversing habits and sets which have grown out of the negative aspects of the person's style. The habits and sets are the more secondary features, the elaborations of the style are thus more modifiable.

To sum up: In everybody's style there are certain strengths and each of us has his own Achilles Heel. The issue in developing a powerful change in a person is related to what you are going to do with the Achilles Heel and how you are going to utilize the strengths. This is the problem of the strategy of style to which this paper has been directed.